Curiosity Door by bananannabeth

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Summary:

The Ghost Riders' dimension isn't the only one with portals into Beacon Hills.

1. The Door Opens

Author's Note:

> Because I just finished my re-watch of Stranger Things Season 1, and Teen Wolf just finished forever, and I have no self control.
>
> Set between 6a and 6b for Teen Wolf and an undetermined time after Season 2 for Stranger Things.

Stiles is the first to notice the lights flickering. He's the first because he's the only one awake, his insomnia striking hard after the Ghost Riders. At first he thinks maybe it's just the power being shitty again, but then the lights go out entirely. And then he thinks maybe someone's come around the corner too fast and taken out a power pole, and he should probably be getting to bed anyway, it's like three in the morning, maybe this is a sign from the universe that he just needs to go to sleep -

But then the lights flicker back on, and off, and on again, in a weird pattern that moves around his room, and Stiles realises that nothing in this town could ever have natural, normal causes.

Carefully, quietly, he gets up from his desk chair and walks across his room. He's stealthy, he's like a ninja, he's an unstoppable force in the night - until he trips over a bag on the floor and crumples, swearing the entire way down.

"Stiles?"

He looks up from under his arm to see Lydia, sitting up in his bed and frowning at him. She's still half asleep, hair flat on one side from being pressed against his pillow, and she stifles a yawn.

"Go back to sleep, Lyds. I'm fine," he says.

She squints at him. "What are you doing?"

"Getting a drink."

She looks at where his foot his stuck through the strap of her handbag, and where his arm is bent at an awkward angle behind his head, and sighs. "Have you slept at all?"

"Uh, yeah, I -" He falters under her glare and detangles himself from her bag, sitting up. "No. Not yet."

"Stiles -"

Her admonishment is interrupted by the lights flickering again. The pattern runs from the lamp on his bedside table to the lamp on his desk to the ceiling light and then to the hallway light, illuminating the cracks around his door.

She glances at him and he shrugs.

“You weren’t getting a drink, were you?”

“…No.”

Lydia rolls her eyes and pushes the covers back, swinging her legs over the side of the bed and standing up. She grabs Stiles’s hand and hauls him to his feet.

The lights flicker again, repeating the same pattern as before. They both watch it happen, and then look back at each other. Lydia doesn’t let go of Stiles’s hand.

He grabs his baseball bat on the way out the door.

The pattern of the lights leads down the stairs and to the front door. They follow it, pausing at the door.

“Should we open it?” Lydia asks in a whisper.

Stiles hesitates. “It’s probably nothing.”

She raises an eyebrow. “In this town?”

He shrugs. “Yeah, okay, it’s definitely something.”

“We can take it though, whatever is it.”

“Right. I’ve got my bat, you’ve got your… banshee… thing…”

“My ‘banshee thing’ saved your life, Stiles, show it a bit more respect.”

He grins at her, lopsided and adoring. “Sorry.”

She tries to look serious, but he sees the corner of her mouth lift up despite her best efforts. She flips her hair over her shoulder and squeezes his hand before letting go. “Ready?”

He adjusts his grip on the bat, grabbing it with both hands. “Ready.”

Lydia unlocks the door, slowly and deliberately, listening out for sounds on the other side. There’s something that Stiles can best describe as a scuffle happening on the other side of the door; soft, muffled noises, like feet scraping against the ground. Lydia grabs the door handle and looks back at him.

Stiles nods.

She opens the door.

And there's a chorus of screams.

Stiles shrieks and flails, swinging the bat wildly above his head.

The kids that are standing on the other side of the door scream, hands flying up in the air to shield their heads.

Amongst the terror, Stiles hears one voice yelling, "Don't hit us man, don't hit us!"

Lydia puts a hand on his arm, and grabs the bat with the other. "Shhh," she says, and he stops screaming.

The kids immediately stop screaming as well. They lower their arms, and Stiles sees that there's five of them - four boys, wide eyed and covered in some sort of gunk, all holding up an unconscious girl in a pink dress.

The lights have stopped flickering.

"What the fu-?"

"What happened to you?" Lydia asks.

“We need help,” one of the boys says. He has dark hair in an almost-bowl cut and is wearing a collared, striped shirt. “She needs somewhere safe to rest.”

“And something to eat,” one of the other boys says with a lisp. He has curly hair mashed under a cap, and he’s looking at Stiles as if this is a totally normal request.

“Yeah, and something to eat,” the first boy repeats. “She likes Eggos.”

“Eggos?” Stiles repeats. “Like the - the *waffles*?”

“Come inside,” Lydia says, stepping back. She reaches out to the unconscious girl. “Do you want help with -”

“No!” all four boys yell in unison, flinching away.

Lydia yanks her hand back, wide eyed. “Okay, that’s all right. Just… you can carry her, then, come put her on the couch.”

Stiles lets them come in, closing the door behind them. “Lydia,” he says lowly, “What are we doing?”

“What, were we just supposed to leave them out there? It’s three in the morning, Stiles, and they’re like, twelve -”

“Exactly! They’re twelve! They’re babies! We’re not equipped to take care of babies, Lydia, Liam is bad enough, I’m not -”

She looks torn between laughing and punching him. She settles with kissing him quickly instead. “Call your dad. And maybe Scott, too.”

“Why, you think this is a -” He glances into the lounge, where the boys are awkwardly manoeuvring the girl onto the couch. “- a Scott type of thing?”

“Five kids have just showed up on your doorstep at three in the morning, one of them unconscious. I don’t know if it’s a Scott thing, but we could use Melissa’s help, at least.”

“Yeah, okay.”

When he has confirmation that both his dad and Scott are on their way over, Stiles joins the group in the lounge. The girl is still unconscious, and two of the boys look like they’re at risk of nodding off, but the other two are chowing down on chips.

Stiles waves his phone at Lydia. “On their way.”

“Who’s on their way?” one of the boys asks, spitting crumbs over the

coffee table. “And what’s that?”

“What’s what?” Stiles turns, looking behind him. It takes him a second to realise that he’s looking at his hand. “My phone?”

The kid laughs. “That’s not a phone.”

“Uh, yeah, this is a phone.”

The kid frowns, like he’s not sure if Stiles is joking or not.

“Hey, Mike,” the curly haired kid says, elbowing the other one in the ribs. “Look.”

Stiles follows their gazes to the television.

Lydia notices, too. “Do you want to watch TV?”

The kids’ eyes bug out. “*That’s* a TV?!”

Stiles shares a thoroughly confused look with Lydia. “Uh, yeah, that’s a TV.”

“No way! It’s huge!”

“And flat!”

Lydia frowns.

“Hey, Mike,” Stiles says. The boy looks surprised to hear him saying his name. “That’s your name, right?”

“Yeah,” he says, warily.

“And your friends?”

They all look at Mike, clearly waiting for his command. He looks at each of them in turn, and then back to Stiles. “Lucas, Dustin and Will.”

Lydia nods to the girl on the couch. “And she is -?”

“El.”

“El?”

“Yeah,” Mike says defensively.

“We’ve called a nurse to come and look at her, okay? Just to make sure she’s okay.”

All four boys start, sitting up straight and yelling, “No!”

Lydia and Stiles both lean back. Stiles wonders if he was this strong willed when he was twelve, and then decides that he was definitely worse.

“She’s unconscious,” Lydia says, slow and calm. “That’s really serious, guys, we can’t just hope that she sleeps it off. And don’t think we haven’t noticed the blood, either.”

“The blood?” Stiles asks, voice squeaking. His girlfriend glares at him and he immediately tries to cover. He glances over the girl, spots the red streak under her nose and on her ear. His stomach drops as he realises just how serious this is. “Right. Yep. That blood. Definitely need a nurse.”

“But -”

“Whatever’s happened,” Stiles says sincerely, crouching down to the boy’s eye level, “whatever you’ve been through, we can help. Trust us. But we need to make sure she’s okay.”

Mike turns back to his friends.

Dustin shrugs. “Where else are we gonna go?”

Will and Lucas don’t look happy about it, but they do look resigned.

“Okay,” Mike says. “But we’re staying with her, the whole time.”

“Of course,” Lydia and Stiles say, perfectly in sync and sincere.

Mike seems to relax the tiniest bit at that.

Dustin grabs another handful of chips. “Is that really a TV?” he asks.

“Yeah, look.” Stiles flicks it on, and all of the boys lose their minds.

“Whoa, look at that!”

“It’s so bright!”

“It’s huge!”

“Oh my god!”

Stiles hands the remote over to Will, smirking. “Watch whatever you want,” he says.

The smile he gets in return is genuine.

With the boys’ focus firmly on the television, Stiles looks over their heads to Lydia, who’s chewing her thumb nail nervously. When he meets her eye she softly shakes her head.

Something is very wrong here.

2. Awakening

Notes for the Chapter:

> I'm so sorry this took so long, but my god I loved Season Two so much the timeline of this story has now shifted to after Season Two. It doesn't effect the first chapter at all, no changes have been made, but Max will be appearing in later chapters, and El was living with Hopper before the kids got themselves into their current mess - which will be explained, I promise. Thanks for being so patient and supportive, much appreciated!!

This isn't where they're supposed to be. Lydia and Stiles don't seem dangerous, and the TV is freaking awesome, but the pit of worry in Mike's stomach is growing with every minute they spend here, and every minute that El doesn't wake up.

While the others watch the screen he watches her, the slow but steady rise and fall of her chest, the fluttering of her eyes behind her eyelids. Lydia had given him a damp cloth to wipe away the blood under El's nose and on her ears, so she looks slightly better now than she had when they'd first fallen out of the Upside Down out the front of this house, but she still doesn't look good.

The sound of the door opening and closing snaps him out of his thoughts. Lydia jumps to her feet and Stiles pushes off from the wall he's been leaning against. Heavy boots stomp down the hall, pausing at the entrance to the lounge.

The cop does a double take. "You kids come from a costume party?"

They all stare at him blankly.

“Ah, Sheriff,” Lydia says delicately. “Maybe not the question to open with.”

“Right, yeah.” He takes his hat off and places it on the coffee table. The party flinches away from him, and he immediately reels back, hands in the air in what Mike assumes is supposed to be a non-threatening gesture. “Sorry, didn’t mean to scare you.”

“I thought you said you called a nurse,” Mike says to Stiles, tone venomous. “Not the cops.”

“He lives here,” is for some reason the first thing out of Stiles’s mouth.

“The nurse is on her way,” Lydia adds. She’s standing now, arms folded over her stomach, expression concerned as she watches El’s chest rise and fall.

Mike glowers. Lying isn’t a good way to earn their trust. He stares the Sheriff down, unintimidated by his age or status.

“Lando,” Dustin says quietly.

“Shut up!” Lucas hisses, elbowing him in the ribs.

Mike doesn’t break his death stare.

The cop breaks first, eyes sliding away from Mike and over to El. His expression shifts, something like recognition flitting across his features. He turns to Lydia, pointing back at El, a silent question passing between the two of them.

Lydia shakes her head in silent answer.

When the cop turns back around he asks softly, “Where are you parents?”

The group don’t answer.

He sighs and rubs his temples, and Mike’s hit with a sudden memory of Hopper making the exact same movement. Maybe it’s a cop thing. Or just an old-man thing.

“I’m here to help, kids, I promise. But we gotta figure out where your parents are if -”

“Our parents aren’t here,” Dustin says.

The other three boys turn to glare at him.

He shrugs. “What? We might as well get that bit out of the way, it’s not like he’s gonna stop asking -”

“Shut up!” Lucas elbows him in the thigh.

“Ow! Stop doing that, you shithead!”

“Guys!” Will reaches over, trying to separate the two of them and copping an elbow to the arm in the process. “Ow!”

“Guys!” Mike yells, and they go still.

On his other side, Eleven stirs, mumbling something in her sleep. They all lean forward to check on her, holding their breath. Her voice is falling in and out of focus, louder and softer, sometimes in the middle of a word, but he can definitely make out one thing she’s saying, over and over - “Mike.”

His chest tightens. He squeezes one of her hands between both of his. “I’m here, El. I’m right here.”

A knock on the door breaks the moment. Mike jumps, but doesn’t let go of El’s hand.

“We’ll get it,” Stiles says. He holds Lydia’s hand, pulling her down the hall after him.

The Sheriff continues watching them. If Mike didn’t know better, he’d say that the concern on his face was genuine.

“It’s probably Melissa, the nurse,” he explains.

But it’s not Melissa who steps into the room first, it’s a guy around the same age as Stiles and Lydia, with dark hair and tan skin. “Oh, my god!” He reels back, pinching his nose. “What is that smell?”

Mike glances across at his friends, all covered in the gunk from the Upside Down. They probably reek, but he’s become desensitised to it by now.

“Out of my way.” The guy’s pushed aside as a woman - Melissa, probably - appears. Her attention immediately zeroes in on El, and she makes a beeline for the couch.

Mike’s grip on Eleven’s hand tightens. “What are you going to do to her?”

Melissa glances at him as if she’s surprised by the question. “Hun, I’m not going to do anything to her. I’m just going to check that she’s all right.”

Mike tries to give her his most intimidating look, but he can feel himself shaking from nerves.

“You can keep holding her hand,” Melissa says casually, leaning over El and shining a light into her ear and then up her nostrils. “How long has she been unconscious?”

“Uh… Fifteen minutes?” Will supplies, voice quiet.

Mike doesn’t miss how Melissa’s face pales. “We need to raise her legs. Get me some cushions.”

Immediately the whole group are up off the couch, handing her cushions. Stiles tries to pass over the seat of an armchair, but Melissa hits it back at him and carefully arranges the smaller pillows beneath El’s legs, so they’re higher up than her head.

“She’s been bleeding,” Melissa says. “When did that start, before or after the fainting?”

Mike hesitates. “Before, but…”

“But it’s normal for her,” Lucas finishes.

“Yeah, happens all the time," Dustin adds.

“All the time?” Melissa frowns, moving away from the couch, probably to give El some room.

Mike immediately takes the space she’s vacated, kneeling beside El’s head and clutching her hand again. “Yeah, it’s - it’s not a big deal, we know about the nosebleeds.”

“This is all normal, it’s just - It usually doesn’t take her this long to wake up after,” Will says, and Mike can tell from his tone that he was saying it to himself.

But everyone else heard it, too. They all glance from Will to Eleven. Even the guy who’d been complaining about the smell looks concerned.

“After what?” Stiles asks.

The party exchange looks.

Mike takes a deep breath. “We can’t tell you everything, okay. We can’t.”

The Sheriff slips immediately into good cop mode, slowly sitting in the armchair Lydia had vacated. He leans forward, elbows on his knees, and meets Mike’s glare with a look of understanding. “All right, if you can’t tell us everything that’s fine.”

All four kids look surprised at that. Mike's hostility slips for just a second, while Lucas, Dustin and Will share a look of open bewilderment.

"Do you mean it?" Lucas asks.

"Of course I mean it."

"We're good at keeping secrets, though, if you change your mind," Stiles says. "Like, really good. Trust me."

Lydia rolls her eyes.

Mike gives him a withering look. "Okay. But it's really important no one finds out we're here."

"Are you hiding from someone?" the Sheriff asks.

"Sort of…"

El's fingers twitch in his, and every coherent thought flies from Mike's mind. "Mike?"

He sits forwards on his knees, leaning over so his face is the first thing she sees as she flutters her eyes open. "El! El, it's okay, I'm

here, we're all here."

She stares up at him, breathing a little heavier than normal. "All here?"

"You got us out," he says quietly, smiling and feeling like he could sob with relief.

"Yeah, you were awesome!" Dustin exclaims, appearing over Mike's shoulder.

Lucas says, "You kicked ass, El!"

And then Will, with the most important statement; "You saved us!"

Mike's smiling now, big and sincere, and El smiles sweetly back at him -

"Saved you from what?"

Mike turns to see all the adults watching them from across the room. It was Lydia who'd spoken, and it's Lydia who steps forward now, stopping on the other side of the coffee table, not close enough to touch but close enough for El to see.

El looks up at her and her smile falls away. “You.”

Lydia looks alarmed at the accusation in the word.

“What?” Mike asks, looking back and forth between the two of them.

“Her,” she says, nodding at Lydia. When she looks back at Mike she’s deadly serious, with that look she always gets when she’s trying to explain something but can’t find the right words.

“What about her?” Stiles and Mike ask at the exact same time.

El stares straight at Lydia and says, “She screams.”

3. Back Up

Joyce is the first to notice, because of course she is. The woman's constantly on high alert - and with good reason.

So when Hopper gets a call through the radio that Joyce Byers is asking for him at the station, he hightails it back there, informing the feuding farmers he'd been dealing with that they'd have to check in with the council to confirm property lines and that it wasn't a police matter unless one of them threatened the other with an axe. Again.

By the time he makes it to the station Joyce has worked herself up into a panic, pacing back and forth across his office and wringing her hands together. She freezes when he steps into the doorway, like a deer in the headlights, and for a moment he's transported back in time. His stomach sinks.

"What is it?" he asks.

At the same time, she exclaims, "They're gone!"

He takes two measured steps into the room, just enough so that he can reach out and gently grab her arms. He forces himself to keep his voice steady, despite the panic climbing its way up his chest. "Who's gone?"

"All of them, Jim, all of them, they're all *gone* !"

“Who? The kids?” he asks, a little bit of the panic seeping in. He thinks of El, alone in their cabin, and he thinks of all the hell she’s already been through, and the panic gets worse.

Joyce nods. “Mhmm. Will’s - Will’s gone, he was - they were meant to be at the Wheeler’s for a sleepover, all of them, but they’re not there, Karen said they left before she was even up this morning, left her a note that they were going to race their bikes, but they race around the junkyard, I know, and they’re not there, and they’re not at the Sinclairs or the Hendersons and no one’s answering at the Mayfields -”

“What about the school?”

Joyce gives him a look. “On a Saturday?”

“They’re not with Nancy or Jonathan?”

She shakes her head.

Hopper runs through the checklist in his head of all the places the kids frequent. “What about… that Harrington kid’s place, they could be there, they like to hang out with him now, right?”

“Nancy rang him, he’s not answering his phone.” Joyce’s bottom lip quivers and Hopper’s heart twinges.

“Maybe they’re at the cabin,” he says reasonably, still forcing himself to stay calm and rational. Never mind that the last two years have been anything but rational. “Let me check in with El, I’ll -”

But he never gets to finish his sentence, because at that moment the door to the station bangs open and there’s a commotion outside. Florence is saying, “Excuse me, you can’t go back there!” and a girl’s yelling incomprehensibly and a boy is speaking over the top of both of them, saying, “We need to see Hopper, where is he? We need to see Hopper right now!”

He steps out into the hall, Joyce right behind, and the panic that’s been brewing erupts in his stomach at the sight of the Harrington kid and Maxine Mayfield trying to force their way towards his office.

“Steve? Max?” Joyce says, pushing past Hopper and running to them, gliding her hands over their shoulders, their heads, their cheeks. “What’s happened?”

Their pants are ripped at the knees, bloody gashes visible through the torn denim. Steve has a black eye, and Max’s palms are bleeding, and both of them are looking at Joyce with a horrible mixture of fear, relief and guilt.

They both start talking to her at once, tripping over their words and interrupting each other, making no sense at all and only getting themselves more and more worked up -

“What. Happened.” Hopper says firmly, and the entire station goes silent.

Steve finds his voice again first. “Uh -”

“My office, now.”

They all file in, but as soon as Hopper locks the door they resume speaking at a million miles an hour.

“One at a time!” he orders, and they glance at each other to decide who’s going to break the news.

Steve goes first. “The kids are gone.”

Joyce, who has been standing beside Hopper and shaking since they got back into the office, lets out a wail that breaks his heart. She collapses forward, barely catching herself on his desk, and Steve quickly pushes a chair around for her to fall into. She grabs his wrist before he can get away. “Gone where?”

“Uh, we’re not sure, exactly, but we think -”

“The Upside Down,” Max finishes.

Hopper resists the urge to flip his desk across the room. “All of them?”

Steve and Max both nod.

He doesn’t want to ask, but he has to ask, he has to know, “Even-”

“Eleven’s with them,” Max says.

He punches the desk hard enough that everything on it rattles, and then he punches it again, and again, until his pencil holder rattles right off the edge and falls to the floor.

Steve looks down at the fallen pencils as though one of them actually got him in the chest.

“How. Did this. Happen,” he grinds out through gritted teeth.

“El had this feeling,” Max begins, and she's speaking more cautiously than Hopper has ever heard her do so before, “that something weird was going on in the forest near the lab. We thought maybe there was a gap, or a small tear, or something, and we were just going to check it out -”

“And you let them?” Hopper snaps at Steve.

He blanches, tries to step away but is held in place by Joyce's iron grip. "I thought they were just trying out a new race track, honestly, if I'd known -"

"He wouldn't have taken us," Max says. "So we didn't tell him. And we really didn't think it'd be that big of a deal, we were just gonna look and then come and tell you, but then -"

"Then what?" Joyce asks, her voice wavering.

Max takes a deep breath. "Then El started saying something about a girl screaming, and Mike asked if there was someone in trouble, and El said no, it wasn't a come help scream, it was a get away scream."

Joyce sobs, finally letting go of Steve's arm to cover her mouth with both hands. He doesn't move, though, standing frozen as he listens to Max's recount.

"And then this - this thing came out of the trees -"

"A Demogorgon?" Joyce asks, well versed in the kid's language.

"Maybe, I don't know -"

"It looked like it," Steve says, shuddering. "But there was this - this light, this bright blue light behind it, and then -"

“And then El tried to fight it but it kept coming, and we all tried to fight it but it was too much, and the light got stronger and brighter, and we were screaming for everyone to run, just run -”

“And we did, we all turned to bolt, even El, but -”

“But we were the only ones fast enough,” Max says, and her barely-held composure finally breaks. She starts to sob.

Steve’s eyes are glistening now too. He puts a hand on Max’s shoulder and squeezes. “We tried to get the others, we tried to stick together as a group, but we - It was too fast, too strong -” He breaks off, swiping at his eyes.

Hopper can’t breathe. His hands are clenched into tight fists and he’s barely aware of Joyce sobbing hysterically beside him, or the kids standing in front of him shaking and crying. All he can think of is Eleven, and the promise he’d made to keep her safe.

“Take me there,” he says, voice firm.

All three of them blink up at him.

“You want to go to the Demogorgon?” Max asks.

“I want to get my daughter and her friends back,” Hopper says. “So you’re going to take me to where you last saw them, and we’re going to kill that son of a bitch and bring them home.”

4. Totally Tubular

El stares at Lydia, unflinching. The girl's eyes are bloodshot, her skin sallow, she's covered head to toe in some sort of disgusting, slimy gunk, and she's literally only just woken up, but there's something about her that screams *danger* . The way that she's looking at Lydia, the intensity in her stare, is legitimately terrifying.

Unsurprisingly, it's Stiles who speaks first. "What are you talking about?"

Mike speaks over the top of him, still holding El's hand. "Is she the girl you heard, back in the forest?"

"You think she's the one El heard being attacked by the Demogorgon?" Lucas asks.

"I don't know, Lucas, that's why I *asked* ," Mike snaps.

Dustin shakes his head. "But that doesn't make any sense, she obviously hasn't been in the Upside Down -"

"Maybe El wasn't hearing the Upside Down, maybe she was -"

Stiles cuts Lucas off. “What the hell are you guys talking about?”

All four boys fall silent.

Lydia and El are still staring at each other. Lydia’s trying to piece together what the boys were saying, searching for any clue of how El could have known about her powers. She doesn’t recall any mention of a Demogorgon in the Beastiary, and the Upside Down doesn’t sound familiar, either… But maybe they’re names the kids made up for things that the Pack have experience with. She needs more information.

“When did you hear me screaming?” she asks, voice level.

El finally blinks. She looks briefly at Mike, who says, “So you *were* screaming?”

Lydia ignores him and waits for El to answer.

After an uncomfortable pause, in which the kids have a silent conversation through a series of dramatic facial expressions and intense stares, El turns back to Lydia and says, “Before the Demogorgon.”

“What’s the Demogorgon?” Sheriff Stilinski asks.

“It’s… bad,” El says, glancing back at Will, who loses what little color he had left in his cheeks.

“Is that what attacked you, what you escaped from?” Scott asks.

“Yeah, sort of,” Dustin answers with a shrug.

“What do you mean, sort of? You can’t ‘sort of’ get attacked by a monster,” Stiles says.

Mike rolls his eyes. “He means it wasn’t the only thing attacking us.”

“Wait a second,” Lucas says, holding both hands up. “You believe us?”

Lydia almost laughs. Oh, if only these kids knew. Stiles and Scott are both smirking, while the Sheriff and Melissa both look exasperated. “Yeah,” she says. “We believe you.”

The kids exchange another wary look.

El speaks first. “Why?”

That wasn’t the response Lydia had been expecting. “Why do we believe you?” El nods, so she continues, “Because we’ve dealt with a

few monsters of our own before."

Mike scoffs. "Yeah, sure."

"Hey," Scott says, offended.

"You haven't dealt with anything like this, trust us," Dustin says.

"Yeah, whatever you say," Stiles says condescendingly.

All of the boys arc up at that, obviously annoyed by his tone, but Melissa speaks before they get a chance. "You were out for a long time, how are you feeling?" she asks El.

El looks confused by the question. "Fine."

"Are you sure? You're not feeling dizzy, or woozy?"

El's eyebrows furrow deeper. "Woozy?"

"It means like, fuzzy, sort of, like you're dizzy and can't think clearly," Mike explains instantly.

“Oh. No.”

Melissa frowns but doesn’t push it.

The Sheriff rubs his eyes before leaning forward, elbows on his knees. “So your parents aren’t here, and you obviously need sleep. You can stay here for the night and we’ll sort this out in the morning. Stiles, can you go get the blow up mattress?”

“The one Scott punctured?” Stiles wrinkles his nose.

“Hey, that was totally an accident!” Scott exclaims, blushing.

“Aw, hell,” Sheriff Stilinski leans back in the chair. “Can we tape it up?”

“I’m sure we can,” Lydia assures him. She can see how exhausted all the kids are, and she knows they’re going to fall asleep on their feet if they keep this up much longer. “Why don’t you get the mattress ready and I’ll show them where the bathroom is so they can get tidied up?”

The kids all glance at each other. Lucas plucks at the front of his shirt and Will frowns. “Uh, we don’t have any other clothes.”

“It’s fine, you can borrow some of Stiles,” the Sheriff says.

“Uh, excuse me?” Stiles throws his arms out to the sides.

The Sheriff gives him a look. “Just go get the kids some damn clothes.”

“El, you can borrow some of mine,” Lydia offers.

Her expression remains blank, but at least she nods.

“Okay,” Scott says. “Let’s go.”

Half an hour later they’re almost all gathered in the lounge again, the boys dressed in old pairs of sweatpants and t-shirts of Stiles’. They’re just waiting for El to get cleaned up and change into a pair of polka dotted pyjamas Lydia keeps at Stiles’ for unexpected sleepovers. When she steps into the lounge in the shorts and cami, Lydia’s pretty sure Mike’s eyes are going to bug out of his head.

She immediately gravitates to his side, and he bends down to whisper something that sounds an awful lot like, “Pretty.”

She smiles shyly and whispers back, “Good.”

“Urgh,” Lucas says, hitting Mike on the arm, while Dustin just grins at them.

“The mattress isn’t ideal,” Scott says, stepping gingerly on one corner of it. It flattens considerably under his weight. “But it’s better than the floor. It’ll be tight, but it should fit three of you, and two can sleep on the couch.”

“Thank you,” Will says.

“You’re welcome,” the Sheriff says, but he sounds distracted. “Where did you kids say you were from, again?”

Protest is written over the kids’ faces, but Dustin answers soon enough, “Hawkins.”

“Hawkins… that in Indiana?”

“Uh, yeah.” Lucas folds his arms over his chest. “Aren’t we in Indiana?”

“Uhh…” Scott looks at Lydia and Stiles. They both just look back at him, equally bewildered. “You’re in Beacon Hills, California.”

“California?!” all five kids exclaim.

Dustin folds his hands on top of his head, saying, “Holy shit! Holy shit!”

“That doesn’t make sense,” Mike says, shaking his head. “We can’t be in California, that’s - it’s -”

“Impossible,” Lucas says.

“Totally tubular,” Dustin says at the same time. The other four turn to glare at him. He holds his hands up in surrender. “Okay, not the time.”

“How the hell did you get from Indiana to here?” Stiles asks.

The kids just look at him, obviously at a loss.

The Sheriff slowly gets to his feet. “Okay, so your parents definitely aren’t here, but is there anyone at all that we can contact?”

“Hopper,” El says, pointing at the Sheriff’s hat.

“Is he a cop?”

“Yeah,” Mike says. “He’s Chief of Hawkins Police.”

“Chief of Hawkins…” The Sheriff jots it down on his notepad. “And what’s his name again?”

“Hopper, Jim Hopper,” Dustin supplies.

The Sheriff freezes. For a moment he looks startled, but he quickly regains his composure, finishes writing, and tucks the notepad back into his pocket. “Okay. I’ll call him first thing in the morning.”

They don’t seem alarmed by the delay.

“All right,” Mike says, speaking for the whole group.

“Okay, we need to get home,” Melissa says, throwing one last worried look at El. “I have the morning shift tomorrow. But call me if you need anything."

“Right,” Scott agrees. He claps Stiles on the back once. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

The McCalls leave, the Sheriff excuses himself, and Lydia and Stiles wait until the kids are settled in the lounge - El and Mike squished together on the couch, everyone else on the blow up mattress - before flicking all the lights off and heading back to bed.

Just before they get to the top of the stairs, the lamp in the corner of the lounge flicks back on. But when Lydia peers over the bannister, none of the kids have moved.

Notes for the Chapter:

> I'm sorry this took so long, and that after the massive wait what I'm posting is... sort of terrible. :(:(:(you deserve better I'm so sorry
>
> I'm also aware that I've stuffed up the design of the Stilinski house but eh.